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Discovering a Units’ Mission
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Abstract

This poster discusses the importance of mission and vision statements and identifies considerations the Mallinson Institute might wish to consider as it develops its own mission statement in light of the University’s and the College of Arts & Sciences evolving missions.

An organization’s mission is a concise statement of why it exists, its reason for being. It is an enduring statement that usually remains the same for many years, providing long term direction and continuity for the organization. An organization’s vision describes the end state that it seeks to create. The development of mission and vision statements is an important process by which the diverse membership of any group can reach consensus about the overall objectives of their activities and their shared values.

Parable of the Three Stone Cutters: The Importance of Having a Mission

Three men are cutting stones using the same tools, working at the same place and at the same rhythm. They are clearly doing the exact same work...

However, their productivity levels are not the same:

John, the first of the stone cutters, is at the end of his tether—exhausted and depressed—and as a result he finds it difficult to cut his stones. He cuts them because he must, not because he wants to. He manages to cut two stones a day, but there is no doubt that he is under duress.

The second stonecutter, Peter, is slightly more alert and more productive. What counts for him is the knowledge that he is working for the good of his family. If he works hard, he will be able to pay for his children’s education. He is able to cut three stones per day.

The third stonecutter, Francis, is highly committed and extremely productive. He imagines that he is building a cathedral. Francis is able to cut 10 stones a day, and always has a smile on his face.

Moral: Commitment and motivation are not dictated by the daily tasks performed, which are the same for all three, but are more closely associated with the mental representation each gives to his situation. By changing the mental representation, it is possible to give new meaning to the situation and create conditions that are conducive to mobilization. While not illustrated, fellowship and working together are also key success factors: this serves to highlight the key role of the manager, who must develop his or her team members, and the importance of buy in to the mission statement.

Considerations When Developing a Unit Mission Statement

Does the mission statement include explicit connections to the mission statements of the College and University?

Does it reflect core values held by the members of the unit, college and university?

Does the mission statement provide faculty, students and staff with guidance regarding how their activities contribute to the unit as a whole?

Does the process in which the mission statement is being developed include opportunities for all stake holders (faculty, students, staff) to contribute?

What Has This Taught the Author About Leadership?

Participating in the Academic Leadership Academy has been a great opportunity to learn and reflect on the characteristics of effective leadership. Great leaders do not exist in a vacuum—to be a good leader you have to have the support of your members, and part of winning that support is making sure that everyone buys into the mission and vision guiding the group. Effective mission statements must be the product of broad consensus rather than being imposed from above.